

CREATING NEW FROM THE OLD: BEETHOVEN'S *VARIATIONS AND FUGUE ON*
AN ORIGINAL THEME, OP. 35, THE "EROICA VARIATIONS"

BY

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Submitted to the faculty of the
Jacobs School of Music in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree,
Doctor of Music,
Indiana University
February, 2014

Accepted by the faculty of the Jacobs School of Music,
Indiana University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree Doctor of Music.

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*To my loving parents, Dang Kyun Shin and Jung Rye Lee, for their continued support
and belief in me.*

Acknowledgments

I would never have been able to finish my degree without the guidance of my committee members. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my advisor, Prof. Edward Auer for his inspirational instruction and guidance. I also would like to acknowledge and give special thanks to Prof. Jean-Louis Haguenauer and Prof. Shigeo Neriki for their continued support and encouragement throughout the entire process.

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Introduction

Variation sets, as a genre, are often maligned by critics and composers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a form which is inferior to the more serious genres of sonata, concerto, symphony, etc. However, many critics feel that Beethoven took variation form to a new level of mastery, raising it to the level of the more serious genres. His Op. 35 “Eroica Variations” are an excellent example of such mastery, in which Beethoven developed a particular theme—the “Prometheus” theme—in what he called a “new manner.” Beethoven, looking not only to compete with his contemporary rivals but perhaps also to measure up to past compositional masters like Bach, sought to compose many variations in an effort to prove his worth as a composer in a challenging genre. He also, by borrowing a theme (his own) from his ballet *Die Geschöpfe des Prometheus* (*The Creatures of Prometheus*), was comparing himself to and competing with the gods for greatness. By examining the *Variations and Fugue on an Original Theme*, Op. 35 in light of historical and biographical information about Beethoven from around the turn of the nineteenth century, it can be shown that the “Eroica Variations” have unique musical and formal features which create a thematically unified work and signify Beethoven’s “new manner.”

Background

The significance of variation technique and variation form itself is well noted by many scholars and critics since Beethoven. Adolf Bernhard Marx is one such scholar and critic; in 1868 he stated that the use of variation is found in almost every genre, and emphasized that students of composition receive training composing variations and in

using variation technique.¹ In 1911, Charles Villiers Stanford declared that “Variations are to free composition what counterpoint is to technique—the master-key of the whole building . . . all depend upon the knowledge of writing variation,” showing the continued belief of the importance of variations in the twentieth century.² Robert Nelson’s 1948 statement sums up the pervasive belief in the value of variation in a simple and easy manner:

The principle of Variation underlies all music. Its effect can be found not only in the variation proper but also in such diverse manifestations as the early cantus firmus mass, the variation suite, the variation *ricercar*, the *double* of the dance suite, the modified recurrence of the principal theme in the rondo, the varied reprise of the classical sonata and symphony . . . [However] the principle of variation is *epitomized* by the variation form itself.³

Although the variation form can be traced back to the sixteenth century, it was Beethoven who brought the instrumental variation form to a new height. “Beethoven,” Marx says “in particular used variation form in the most deeply thoughtful way. One may even call it the chief lever of his creative activity.”⁴ And as Kurt von Fischer has remarked, “With Beethoven, variation becomes . . . a central form in the life work of a composer.”⁵

According to Steven Whiting’s study, by 1800, there were nineteen individual variation sets and ten variation movements in larger works in Beethoven’s output, and

¹ Adolf Bernhard Marx, *Die Lehre von der musikalischen Komposition*, 4th ed., 4 vols. (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1868), III, 53; cited in Robert Nelson, *The Technique of Variation* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1948), 1.

² Charles Villiers Stanford, *Musical Composition* (London: Macmillan; Stainer and Bell, 1911), 51.

³ Robert Nelson, *The Technique of Variation*, 1. Emphasis mine.

⁴ Adolf Bernhard Marx, *Die Lehre von der musikalischen Komposition, praktisch theoretisch*, 3rd ed., vol.3 (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1857); quoted in Steven Moore Whiting, “To the ‘New Manner’ Born: A Study of Beethoven’s Early Variations” (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, 1991), 1.

⁵ Kurt von Fischer, “Variation,” *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart* 13, 1274–1309; quoted in Whiting, “To the ‘New Manner’ Born,” 4.

among the thirty-eight instrumental works he had published, sixteen were variation sets.⁶ From 1800 to 1812, Beethoven used variation technique in nearly half of his instrumental music. And from 1818, almost every other work included a variation movement.⁷ Although later the focus has moved from the independent sets to variation movements, Beethoven maintained his affection to the form.

Around 1800—and after Haydn and Mozart, whose variation sets had “exemplary quality” and “enduring popularity”—variation form was in bad repute with critics. There were many scathing views, which included such scornful statements as “an enormous heap of variations [were being] produced (fabriciert) and unfortunately printed as well,”⁸ “there was no end to the making of variations in Germany.”⁹ Jérôme Joseph de Momigny had lamented that “many words and little sense” were “the motto of all these variations that teem with notes.”¹⁰ “Brilliant but not difficult” was what the reviews in *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* were repeating, hinting that many variation sets were aiming to satisfy amateurs because of their popularity and profitability.¹¹ Although sometimes, individual variations were picked out to be praised or blamed by the reviewer, and in rare cases, all the variations in a single set were mentioned, it was not until in May 1803, with Beethoven’s Op. 34, that overall form was considered¹²: “everything fits so closely together, making a beautifully rounded whole.”¹³ This was a review without precedent

⁶ Whiting, “To the ‘New Manner’ Born,” 3–4.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* (hereafter cited as *AmZ*) 1 (1799): 367, 542; quoted in Whiting, “To the ‘New Manner’ Born,” 2–3.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Nicolas Etienne Framery, Pierre Louis Guinguen , and J r me Joseph de Momigny, *Encyclop die m thodique: Musique*, vol. 2 (Paris: Agasse, 1818), s.v. “variations”; quoted in Whiting, “To the ‘New Manner’ Born,” 3.

¹¹ Whiting, “To the ‘New Manner’ Born,” 37.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ *AmZ* 5 (May 1803): 557; quoted in Whiting, “To the ‘New Manner’ Born,” 37.

even for the Haydn and Mozart's variations. It is noteworthy that until this point, his contemporaries did not think that variations could have the same qualities that one would expect to find in symphonies, sonatas and string quartets¹⁴; it was Beethoven who showed what variations could be, ennobling the genre of variations with his Opp. 34 and 35. As he himself would announce—"I have composed two sets of variations. . . . Both sets are worked out in *quite a new manner*."¹⁵

Despite Beethoven's Op. 35, *15 Variationen (mit Fuge)* in E-flat popularly being called the "Eroica Variations" after his Third Symphony, many scholars consider the "Prometheus" Variations to be a more proper title, after Beethoven's ballet *The Creatures of Prometheus*, Op. 43, of 1800–1801.¹⁶ This would reflect the composer's wish to indicate the origin of the Op. 35 variation set's theme:

In the grand variations you have forgotten to mention that the theme has been taken from an allegorical ballet for which I composed the music, namely: Prometheus, or, in Italian, Prometeo. This should have been stated on the title-page. And I beg you to do this if it is still possible, that is to say, if the work has not yet appeared. If the title-page has to be altered, well, let it be done at my expense. . . .¹⁷

In this ballet of 1801, the theme is used as the refrain of the rondo form in the Finale (see **Ex. 2** in p. 6)

Yet before this ballet, the theme also appeared as the seventh of Beethoven's *Twelve Contredanses for orchestra*, WoO 14. Seen in **Example 1** (p. 5, compare the themes from the other three works, **Ex. 2–4** in pp. 6–8), the theme in this piece is not

¹⁴ Whiting, "To the 'New Manner' Born," 37.

¹⁵ Letter to Breitkopf & Härtel, Leipzig, June, 1803, Emily Anderson, ed. and trans., *The Letters of Beethoven*, 3 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1961), I, 76. *Emphasis mine*.

¹⁶ The ballet was published first in piano reductions as Op. 24, and later, was published again in full score as Op. 43. Now, the "Spring" violin sonata bears Op. 24. For further reading on the "Prometheus" Variations name, see Lewis Lockwood, *Beethoven: The Music and the Life* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2003), 141.

¹⁷ Letter to Breitkopf & Härtel, Anderson, *The Letters of Beethoven*, I, 94. Härtel did not follow Beethoven's wish about the title-page as he had promised (June 30, 1803).

much different from the other three uses. The only exception—an unassuming but surprisingly important exception—is the octave transposition of the second note B-flat, changing the profile of the bass.¹⁸

This change made all the difference. The octave jump from the higher B-flat to the lower B-flat, instead of just repeating the same note, gave this theme new life for Beethoven. With this one change, something ordinary became something special to explore.

Ex. 1: Beethoven, *Twelve Contredanses for Orchestra*, WoO 14, No. 7

Nr. 7

Clarineti in B

Corni in Es

Violino I

Violino II

Violoncello e Contrabasso

¹⁸ As this difference in the profile of the bass of the theme is obvious, many have commented on it. For instance, see Ellwood Derr, "Beethoven's Long-Term Memory of C.P.E. Bach's Rondo in E Flat, W. 61/1 (1787), Manifest in the Variations in E Flat for Piano, Opus 35 (1802)," *The Musical Quarterly*, 70, no. 1 (Winter, 1984): 45–76, and Ludwig Misch and G. I. C. deCourcy, "Fugue and Fugato in Beethoven's Variation Form," *The Musical Quarterly* 42, no. 1 (Jan., 1956): 14–27.

Ex. 2: *The Creatures of Prometheus*, Op. 43, Act Two, No.16 Finale

Allegretto.

Flauti.

Oboi.

Clarineti in B.

Fagotti.

Corni in Es.

Trombe in Es.

Timpani in Es.

Violino I.

Violino II.

Viola.

Violoncello e Basso.

Ex. 3: Op. 35 variations, *Tema*

Tema

Measures 1-10 of the *Tema* from Op. 35 variations. The score is in B-flat major and 3/4 time. The melody in the right hand is marked *dolce* and *p* (piano). The accompaniment in the left hand is marked *p* and *cresc.* (crescendo). The score includes fingerings (1, 2, 3, 4, 5) and a trill (*tr*) in the final measure.

Ex. 4: *Eroica* Symphony, Finale, mm. 76–98

Measures 74-98 of the *Eroica* Symphony, Finale. The score is in B-flat major and 3/4 time. The woodwinds (Flute, Oboe, Clarinet, Bassoon) and strings (Violins, Violas, Cellos, Double Basses) are marked *dol.* (dolce) and *p* (piano). The brass (Trumpets, Trombones, Cornets, Basses) are marked *cresc.* (crescendo) and *sf* (sforzando). The score includes a variety of musical notations, including slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

Ex. 4, continued

The musical score for Ex. 4, continued, spans measures 82 to 90. It is written for a full orchestra, with parts for Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet (Cl.), Bassoon (Fag.), Cor Anglais (Cor.), Trumpet (Tr.), and Trombone (Tp.). The score is in 2/4 time and features a complex rhythmic pattern. The music is characterized by a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together. Dynamic markings include 'decresc.' (decrescendo), 'p' (piano), 'f' (forte), 'arco.' (arco), and 'pizz.' (pizzicato). The score is divided into two systems, with measures 82-88 in the first system and measures 89-90 in the second system. The notation includes various musical symbols such as clefs, key signatures, and articulation marks.

It was long thought that the theme first appeared in the ballet, *The Creatures of Prometheus*. But based on the profile difference between *Contredanses* and the other

three pieces, and the fact that even though the exact date of *Contredanses* is not known, the earliest sketches of the work can be traced back to 1795, it is now believed that the theme is originally from *Contredanses*.¹⁹

Since all these works are written so closely to each other, it is very interesting to see how Beethoven was deeply preoccupied with this specific theme; that it got used not once, not twice, but four times in the space of just a few years. I believe it was not just because he liked this theme so much, but because he felt that he had not exhausted all the possibilities yet. He wanted to see what he could do to transform this interesting idea of his into something extraordinary.

As previously mentioned, Beethoven originally wanted the title page of Op. 35 variations to include the fact that the theme was taken from his ballet, *The Creatures of Prometheus*. The reason why he insisted on mentioning *Prometheus* and not the *Contredanses*, where the theme had originated from, is surely because of the popularity of his ballet. It was performed fourteen times in 1801, and nine times in 1802.²⁰ Beethoven might have thought that reusing the theme would draw on its popularity from the ballet to sell more sheet music.

Or, perhaps it was because the ballet was a significant work for him. The ballet was his first major stage work, and at that time in Vienna, ballet was highly regarded. For a composer who was mainly known only for his chamber music, a symphony, and 2 piano concertos,²¹ it was an important opportunity to write a ballet in Vienna.²²

¹⁹ For more information on the origin of the theme see Misch and deCourcy, "Fugue and Fugato": 14–27, and Thomas Sipe, *Beethoven: Eroica Symphony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

²⁰ Sipe, *Beethoven*, 15.

²¹ In his early years in Vienna, Beethoven, although he had composed rather large body of works in Bonn, at first, was mainly accepted as a virtuoso pianist and only as a student of composition. For more information, see Lockwood, *Beethoven*, part one and two.

Secondly, the subject matter itself, may have also been close to his heart. Around 1799, Beethoven became aware of the onset of his deafness. By 1802, his acceptance and struggle to come to terms with his deafness was well expressed in his *Heiligenstadt Testament*, in which he saw art as the way out of his suffering—as the way to triumph over his deafness. And this reaction to his deafness may have caused him to identify himself with the heroic figure Prometheus; as Thomas Sipe suggested: “in the fall of 1802, Beethoven did regard himself as something of a Prometheus,” seeing his mission as “the edification of humankind through art.”²³ This can be seen even prior to the *Eroica Variations* in the story of *The Creatures of Prometheus*, where his choice of a contemporary variation on the classic Prometheus story shows his mission of Enlightenment edification.

Beethoven’s Prometheus was different than the one we know from Classical Greek myth. In Greek mythology, Prometheus, a Titan, credited with the creation of man from clay, gives fire to humanity in defiance of the Olympian gods. As a consequence he is punished by Zeus, eternally bound to a rock, his liver eaten by an eagle every day for the rest of his existence.

However, Salvatore Viganò, who was the choreographer, used a different version of the myth, which was based on a widely circulating rendition first found in the 1748 novella *Les hommes de Prométhée* by Anne-Gabriel Meusnier de Querlon. In Querlon’s story, Prometheus brings to life a man and a woman created from stone, who then, surrounded by nature’s beauty, fall in love with each other. Due to the popularity of

²² For Beethoven, this was the first stage work in Vienna, and he considered this as an opportunity to impress the Imperial Court as a composer of large-scale, dramatic works. See Sipe, *Beethoven*, 12.

²³ Sipe, *Beethoven*, 20.

Querlon's version, in 1775 Charles-Pierre Colardeau versified the novella, which was then translated into Italian anonymously. Then, in Bassano in 1790, the story appeared with the title, *Gli uomini di Prometeo*.²⁴

We find a similar version of the recreated myth, also lacking Prometheus' punishment from Zeus for giving fire to mankind, in Denis Diderot's *Encyclopédie* (1751–80). Here, Prometheus, "a wise and polished prince," showed the "extremely vulgar" people "how to live a more humane life."²⁵ And in Johann Gottfried Herder's *Letters on the Advancement of Humanity* (1794–97), Prometheus is a "bringer of reason and culture,"²⁶ giving a historical/mythological basis to this "enlightened" Prometheus myth. Viganò took the idea of creating a man and a woman from stone which originated in *Les hommes de Prométhée*, adding to it a message of enlightenment from Diderot and Herder, to synthesize the two trends in his construction of the ballet.²⁷

The playbill from a performance of Beethoven's *The Creatures of Prometheus* reads as follows:

The basis of this allegorical ballet is the fable of Prometheus.

The Greek philosophers, by whom he was known, explain the essence of the fable in this way: they describe him as a sublime spirit, who came upon the men of his time in a state of ignorance, who refined them through science and art, and imparted to them morals.

Proceeding from this basis, in the present ballet two statues appear coming to life, and they are made responsive to all the passions of human life through the power of harmony.

Prometheus leads them to Parnassus so that they may be taught by Apollo, the god of the fine arts. Apollo commands that Amphion, Arion, and Orpheus make music known to them, that Melpomene and Thalia

²⁴ See Sipe, *Beethoven*, 13.

²⁵ *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, 17 vols. (Neufchâtel, 1751–80; rpt Stuttgart, 1966), XII, 446; quoted in Sipe, *Beethoven*, 13.

²⁶ *Briefe zur Beförderung der Humanität* (Letters on the Advancement of Humanity) (1794–7). See Raymond Trousson, *Le thème de Prométhée dans la littérature Européenne*, 2 vols. (Geneva, 1964), I, 272–8; cited in Sipe, *Beethoven*, 13.

²⁷ Sipe, *Beethoven*, 13.

make tragedy and comedy known, that Terpsichore and Pan make shepherd dances (invented by Pan) known, and that Bacchus make the heroic dance that he invented known.²⁸

Beethoven and Viganò's borrowing of these contemporary versions achieves their aim of enlightening their audience, and would be the start of Beethoven's efforts to enlighten his audience with the "Prometheus" theme.

Only 12 days after his Testament (October 6, 1802), Beethoven wrote to his publishers about his newly composed Opp. 34 and Op. 35:

I have composed two sets of variations, one consisting of eight variations and the other of thirty. Both sets are worked out in quite a new manner, and each in a separate and different way. . . . Usually I have to wait for other people to tell me when I have new ideas, because I never know this myself. But this time—I myself can assure you that in both these works the method is quite new so far as I am concerned.²⁹

The differences between his new manner in the Op. 34 and Op. 35 are indeed quite great. In the Op. 34, Beethoven utilizes third relationships between each variation, stepping down a third each time; he puts the theme in F major, then moves down to D, B-flat, G, E-flat to C minor, then ends in F in the Finale, virtually making unprecedented use of placing every variation in different key. Although using keys other than the tonic and the parallel minor can be found in prior variations, such as the 1799 Eight Variations on "Tändeln und Scherzen" from *Soliman II* by Süssmayr, WoO 76 in F (the fifth variation is in D minor, the sixth in B-flat), but here in Op. 34, Beethoven further developed the concept, which became the guiding principle for the work.³⁰

²⁸ Reprinted in Constantin Floros, *Beethovens Eroica und Prometheus Musik* (Wilhelmshaven: Heinrichshofen, 1978), 37; quoted in Thomas Sipe, *Beethoven*, 13.

²⁹ Letter to Breitkopf & Härtel, Leipzig, October 18, 1802, Anderson, I, 76–7.

³⁰ For more information on Op. 34, see Klaus-Jürgen Sachs, "Beethoven's Variations for Piano, Opus 34," and "About Key Characteristics," in *Beethoven's Variations for Piano, Opus 34* (Mainz: Schott Music, 2007), 20–57, 58–79.

Another notable aspect of Op. 34 is the meter and tempo change from variation to variation—such tempo differentiation in Beethoven can otherwise only be found in the 13 Variations on “Es war einmal ein alter Mann,” WoO 66 of 1792 and the *Diabelli Variations*, Op. 120; this technique helps each variation acquire a more distinctive character. Furthering the character distinctions, Beethoven also uses style change in two movements of Op. 34, which necessitates altering the tempo and the meter—this can be seen in the ‘Minuetto’ and ‘Marcia’ variations.³¹

Two months after this declaration of the “new manner,” Beethoven requested to include the following introductory note in the printed edition of Opp. 34 and 35:

As these variations are distinctively different from my earlier ones, instead of indicating them like my previous ones by means of a number (such as, for instance, No. 1, 2, 3, and so on) I have included them in the proper numerical series of my greater musical works, the more so as the themes have been composed by me.³²

It is very interesting that at this time, Beethoven was keeping a separate numerical series for his lesser keyboard publications; he was consciously writing two kinds of music, serious and popular.³³ Although in 1946, Otto Erich Deutsch had documented the pieces, their instrumentation, and any borrowed melodies in the series,³⁴ it is not general knowledge that Beethoven was numbering his works in such a way. Starting out as a numbered series of variation sets from July 1793 to Jan. 1802, there were 13 sets of variations in this popular category, which were later assigned with WoO numbers (*Werke*

³¹ See Sachs, “Beethoven’s Variations,” 20–57, and “About Key Characteristics,” 58–79.

³² Letter to Breitkopf & Härtel, Leipzig, December 18, 1802, Anderson, I, 83–4.

³³ See Robert Nosow, “Beethoven’s Popular Keyboard Publications,” *Music & Letters*, 78, no. 1 (Feb., 1997): 56–76.

³⁴ See Otto Erich Deutsch, “The Numbering of Beethoven’s Minor Works,” *Notes*, Second Series, 4, no. 1 (Dec., 1946): 36–8.

ohne Opuszahl, or Works without Opus Number) by Georg Kinsky in 1955.³⁵ These works were essentially of a popular type, mostly based on preexisting tunes by others, and meant for the amateur market³⁶ (For instance, there are 6 Variations on “Nel cor più non mi sento” from *La Molinara*, WoO 70, of Paisiello, and later he famously wrote variations on *God Save the King*, WoO 78, 1803). The “Eroica Variations” and his 6 major variations (Op. 34), which used original themes, were the first sets that Beethoven was willing to give opus numbers among his other “serious” compositions, showing that he valued them more than his less serious efforts. This separation between Beethoven’s greater and lesser works also reflects the late-eighteenth century concepts of *Kenner* (connoisseurs) and *Liebhaber* (amateurs),³⁷ and shows that Beethoven knew that some of his variations were less serious works, but that his Op. 34 and 35 and his “new manner” were intended for *Kenner*.

Analysis

Keeping in mind Beethoven’s idea of his “new manner,” we can look at the beginning of the Op. 35 variations. The theme of the “Eroica Variations” is shown in **Example 3** (see p. 7). As previously mentioned, Beethoven used this theme four times over his career, where by far the most familiar appearance is in the Finale of his heroic Third Symphony, Op. 55, of 1803. In both the Op. 35 variations and the Finale of the Third Symphony, Beethoven presents the bass of the theme, called *Basso del Tema*, before the theme itself. In the Variations, the *Basso del Tema* appears after the introductory chord, and in the symphony after the introductory measures 1–11. In both

³⁵ Otto Erich Deutsch: 36–8.

³⁶ See Nosow, “Beethoven’s Popular Keyboard Publications”: 56–7.

³⁷ *Ibid.*: 65.

pieces, Beethoven begins with the *Basso del Tema* in the lowest bass register; this can be seen in the Variations both in the unison and in the *A due*, and in the Symphony in measures 12–43. He then moves the *Basso* to the middle voice or range (*A tre* in the Variations and mm. 44–59 in the Sym.), and then to the top voice (*A quattro* in the Variations and mm. 60–75 in the Sym.), each time adding more contrapuntal lines to thicken the texture before finally merging the *Basso* with the *Thema* proper. Because of the shared theme, and more importantly the above mentioned process which Beethoven employs in both pieces, the nickname “Eroica” was also given to the variation set, even though it was written a year earlier than the symphony.

While many scholars acknowledge that the Third Symphony is a pivotal moment in Beethoven’s stylistic development, signs of this “new manner” can be seen developing earlier in this variation set, Op. 35. For instance, in addition to the opening procedure, the Finale of the symphony has the similar structure to the Op. 35 variations. The Finale of the symphony is in a “hybrid of variation and sonata (or three part) forms.”³⁸ Although it is not in the rigid form of a classical variation set, it is based on the variation form and is framed by an introduction and a coda. In the recapitulation (or the third part) of the symphony’s Finale, there are two variations beginning at measure 349; these symphonic variations parallel the two “post-fugue”³⁹ variations from Op. 35 (m. 133 ff. of the *Finale alla Fuga*). Just as the first and second post-fugue variations (m. 133 ff. and m. 165 ff.) of the variation set have the theme in the soprano and in the bass respectively, the first and

³⁸ For more information on this, see A. Peter Brown, *The Symphonic Repertoire*, vol. 2, *The First Golden Age of the Viennese Symphony: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2002), 472.

³⁹ Derr, “Beethoven’s Long-Term Memory”: 45–76.

the second variations of the symphony's recapitulation (m. 349 ff. and m. 380 ff.) also have the theme in the soprano and in the bass.⁴⁰

Example 5 (p. 16–7) shows the beginning of the Op. 35 variations. Beethoven opens the work with a huge, eight-notes, fortissimo tonic chord, a sort of curtain call alerting the audience to the start of the piece. This chord, in its singular majesty, acts as a Titanic opening sonority to the introduction to come, which Beethoven indicates with *Introduzione col Basso del Tema* in the score.

After the chord introduction, he presents the *Basso del Tema*, “bass of the theme,” not the theme proper, in bare octaves. This is followed by three sections, which could be considered pre-variations on the *Basso del Tema*, labeled *a due*, *a tre*, and *a quattro*, meaning a theme accompanied by one voice, two voices, and three voices respectively.

Ex. 5: Op. 35, *Introduzione* and *Tema*

The musical score for Beethoven's Op. 35, 'Introduzione' and 'Tema', is presented in four systems. The first system shows the initial fortissimo (ff) tonic chord in the bass. The second system, labeled 'Basso del Tema', features bare octaves in the bass, marked ff. The third system, labeled 'A due', shows a melody in the treble and bass, marked p. The fourth system, labeled 'A tre', shows a melody in the treble and bass, marked p. The score includes dynamic markings (ff, p, pp) and tempo markings (poco adagio, Tempo 1).

⁴⁰ See Brown, *The Symphonic Repertoire*, vol. 2, 472.

Ex. 5, continued

The musical score for Ex. 5, continued, is written for piano and bass. It consists of eight systems of music, each with a piano (p) and bass (b) staff. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats) and the time signature is 2/4.

- System 1:** Labeled "A tre" (Allegretto). The piano staff begins with a *p* dynamic. The bass staff has fingerings 1 3, 1 2 1 3, and 1 2 1 4.
- System 2:** Labeled "adagio" and "Tempo I". The piano staff has a *p* dynamic. The bass staff has a *p* dynamic.
- System 3:** Labeled "A quattro". The piano staff has a *sf* dynamic. The bass staff has a *f* dynamic.
- System 4:** The piano staff has a *ff* dynamic. The bass staff has a *ff* dynamic.
- System 5:** The piano staff has a *p* dynamic. The bass staff has a *f* dynamic.
- System 6:** Labeled "Tema". The piano staff has a *dolce* marking. The bass staff has a *p* dynamic.
- System 7:** The piano staff has a *decresc.* marking. The bass staff has a *p* dynamic.
- System 8:** The piano staff has a *ff* dynamic. The bass staff has a *decresc.* marking.

The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and trills. The piano staff often features complex rhythmic patterns, while the bass staff provides a steady accompaniment.

In these pre-variations, the *Basso del Tema* gradually moves up in register functioning first as a bass in *a due*, as a middle voice in *a tre*, and as a melody in the top voice in *a quattro*.

And after all of this movement of the bass, finally we hear the theme proper. As Beethoven describes, this introduction “. . . begins with the bass of the theme and eventually develops into two, three and four parts; and not till then does the theme appear. . . .”⁴¹ The *Basso del Tema*’s movement upward, together with the increasing number of voices, gradually, and effectively build up the audience’s expectation towards the theme proper.

When finally the theme arrives, it is only then, that the audience realizes that the bass, which they believed was the theme until now, is not the theme itself but the bass of the theme—the *Prometheus* theme they are so familiar with, from Beethoven’s popular ballet. This feeling of arrival, that the theme is heard not just as a presentation at that moment, but as an outcome, as a consequence of a development, is supported by the fact that the seeds of the theme proper are already embedded in the bass of the theme.⁴²

For instance, as can be found in **Example 5** (p. 16–7), the theme is directly presaged by the last phrase of the bass (mm. 14–16). The *basso* outlines the melody of the theme; compare G (m. 14)–A-flat (m. 15)–B-flat (m. 16) of the *Basso del Tema* to the theme’s G (m. 1 of the *Tema*)–A-flat (m. 3 of the *Tema*)–B-flats (m. 5–6 of the *Tema*). Also in the *A due*, the first counterpoint embodies the outline of the theme (G–A-flat–B-flat) as well (see mm. 1, 3, and 5–6 of the *A due* for the corresponding notes) and the

⁴¹ Letter to Breitkopf & Härtel, Leipzig, April 8, 1803, Anderson, I, 89.

⁴² Carl Dahlhaus, *Ludwig van Beethoven: Approaches to his Music*, trans. Mary Whittall (Oxford: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1991), 171–2.

scale-wise motion in the second half of the theme is prepared in the second half of *A quattro* (see m. 9 of the *Tema* and *A quattro*).⁴³

If we look only at the *Introduzione* and the *Tema*, the *Introduzione* forms a kind of variation on the *Basso del Tema*, and the *Tema* itself also can be heard as a variation on the *Basso*. This aspect can be seen in Beethoven's own words where, writing to Breitkopf and Härtel, he defends why there are only fifteen variations (as opposed to the thirty that were expected):

As to variations, about which you think that there are not as many as I stated, you are certainly mistaken; my difficulty was that they could not be indicated in the same way; for instance, in the grand ones where the variations are merged in the Adagio, and the Fugue, of course, cannot be described as a variation; and similarly the introduction to these grand variations which, as you yourself have already seen, begins with the bass of the theme and eventually develops into two, three and four parts; and not till then does the theme appear, which again cannot be called a variation, and so forth.⁴⁴

Therefore, the theme is gradually developed from the *Basso*, and the *Introduzione*, together with the theme proper is kind of a small variation set within this grand set of variations.

Furthermore, it also reflects the goal-oriented character of this variation set as a whole. As the climax in this small variation set is the *Tema* itself at the end, in its closing section of a substantial proportion, the variations as a whole climax in the Finale with the fugue, with the return of the *Tema*, and its triumphant reinforcement in the bass chords.

Thomas Sipe offers the interesting hypotheses that Beethoven might have intended this *Introduzione* and the *Tema* as a synopsis of the ballet. He compares the

⁴³ Dahlhaus, *Ludwig van Beethoven*, 172. See also Christopher Reynolds, "Beethoven's Sketches for the Variations in E flat Op.35," in *Beethoven Studies 3* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 52.

⁴⁴ Letter to Breitkopf & Härtel, Leipzig, April 8, 1803, Anderson, I, 88–9.

presentation of the *Basso del Tema* in octaves with the “children” of Prometheus in stone, and views the contrapuntal, gradually added voices of *A due*, *A tre*, and *A quattro* as the children gradually coming to life from its frozen status. Finally, the children become fully alive, celebrating with the arrival of the *Tema*.⁴⁵ Though such a colorful interpretation could easily be dismissed, upon reflecting on Beethoven’s compositional and edificatory goals it becomes apparent that this interpretation makes sense. It reflects Beethoven’s Enlightenment views which finds their way again, into his *Eroica Symphony*; Prometheus, who taught morality to mankind, did so in a “learned,” enlightened style, paralleled by the learned style in his *Introduzione*. And as the children gradually grow, the music is transformed not only at the level of the *Introduzione* with the movement of the *Basso del thema*, but also throughout the duration of the piece, flowering at the end with the fugue, the pinnacle of the learned style. Further, this interpretation parallels with Beethoven’s goal-oriented compositional structure, which is not only important for this piece, but in many ways is one of Beethoven’s most famous compositional trademarks.

The *Tema*, as it is in so many cases of this kind, is in two symmetrical parts, and each part is repeated. And the following fifteen variations normally follow the formal and harmonic scheme of the theme. Some variations are related to the melody of the *Tema*, and some are more closely modeled on the *Basso del Tema*.

Beethoven also uses the Fermata in the second half of the *Tema*,⁴⁶ and B-flats of the *Basso del Tema* (m. 11) to create overarching relationships between all the variations.

⁴⁵ See Sipe, *Beethoven*, 19.

⁴⁶ For more on Beethoven’s use of fermatas, see Victor Lederer, *Beethoven’s Piano Music: A Listener’s Guide*, (Milwaukee: Amadeus Press, 2011), 145, and Glenn Stanley, “The ‘wirklich ganz neue Manier’ and the Path to It: Beethoven’s Variations for Piano, 1783–1802,” *Beethoven Forum* 3 (1994): 74.

It is very easy to hear the three hammering B-flats and the sustained fermata in many of the variations.

Although Fermatas were often present in Classical variation themes based on opera tunes,⁴⁷ there are only three other themes set by Beethoven containing them (WoO 66, 75 and 76), and here, the fermata is a notable part of the theme because of its articulating function, placed in the next to the last phrase, constituting the climax of the theme.

Most variation sets have a variation in minor. And the Op. 35 variations are no exception. In this variation set, Beethoven places two minor variations (Var. VI in relative minor, and XIV in parallel minor) in the body of the work. Let us first examine Variation XIV in parallel minor—E-flat minor.

As in many *minore* variations in the Classical Period, Variation XIV is lyrical and chromatic, containing suspensions. Variation XIV recalls the two-voice aspect of *A due* (here, in the form of melody and accompaniment),⁴⁸ and also restores the supremacy of the *Basso del Tema* from the *Introduzione* by placing it in the right hand, making it the melody (see **Ex. 14**, p. 33). Since *A quattro*, this is the first time hearing the *Basso* in the treble part. And the striking change in register (from mm. 1–8, to three octaves lower in mm. 9–16), feels like representing the whole *Introduzione* in reverse, from top to bottom this time, but without the intermediate steps of the *Introduzione*. Therefore, Variation XIV gives us the sense of reprise of the beginning of the piece,⁴⁹ and here Variation XV (based on the *Tema*), instead of the *Tema*, follows; in this sense, Variations XIV (on the bass of the theme) and XV (on the theme proper) parallels the Finale, *Alla Fuga*—the fugue (on the bass of the theme) and the two post-fugue variations on the theme.

⁴⁷ Stanley, “The ‘wirklich ganz neue Manier’ and the Path to It”: 74.

⁴⁸ Derr, “Beethoven’s Long-Term Memory”: 62.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*: 62–3.

Though there is no indication that Variation XIV should be played slower than XIII, because of its lyrical nature it is not unreasonable that it would be played a bit slower, taking time to demonstrate the emotionality in the chromatic passages and the suspensions. With this in mind, one might view Variation XIV together with XV—which is a slow, highly decorated variation—as a sort of combined slow movement.⁵⁰ In doing so, it would fit into the usual slow-fast pairing of Classical variation form, becoming the slow movement which is followed by the fast Allegro con brio, Finale, *Alla Fuga*⁵¹: it is also noteworthy that this closing section occupies about one third of the total playing time, reflecting Beethoven’s tendency towards end-weightedness.

In this cycle, every variation is in E-flat except one—Variation VI. The melody of this C minor variation has virtually the same notes as the *Tema* in E-flat major except for one: E-natural, instead of an E-flat, in measure 7. However, this may not be immediately apparent to the listener, due to the attention-grabbing nature of the shift in tonality. The variation is awkwardly, almost comically, forced into C minor instead of its very natural E-flat major, made even more awkward because of the unexpected minor melody of the *Tema* in the top voice, which the listener remembers as being in major. This variation, with its “tonal-harmonic alienation”⁵² marks a formal aural and compositional point before the Variation VII, a Cannon at the octave, a style of the past.

⁵⁰ While according to Marston, Schenker argues that Variation XV should be considered separately from XIV (see Nicholas Marston, “Notes to a Heroic Analysis: A Translation of Schenker’s Unpublished Study of Beethoven’s Piano Variations, Op. 35,” in *Nineteenth-century Piano Music: Essays in Performance and Analysis*, ed. David Witten (New York: Garland, 1997), 22–3), Charles Rosen supports the idea of Var. XIV and XV forming a slow movement together. See Charles Rosen, *The Classical Style: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1972), 438.

⁵¹ Beethoven repeats this pattern in the *Diabelli Variations*, Op.120, by pairing a slow, decorative Var. XXXI with the double fugue, Var. XXXII, and furthermore, in *Diabelli*, Beethoven expands the idea of combined slow movement by putting three slow variations (Vars. XXIX, XXX, XXXI) consecutively before the fugue. See Lederer, *Beethoven’s Piano Music*, 150, and Cockshoot, *The Fugue*, 122.

⁵² Dahlhaus, *Ludwig van Beethoven*, 173.

When we reach the coda of Variation XV, we come to realize that the C minor in Variation VI was not a random choice, but rather was an important formal marker; the coda of Variation XV parallels Variation VI in formal, melodic, and harmonic ways.⁵³ The coda has exactly the same melody and is also in the same C minor as Variation VI. Beethoven turns this once-used idea into something new, transforming the theme into a new rhythm and compressing it from its original eight measures into two. As seen in **Example 6**, Beethoven tonicizes C minor, then progresses to the dominant, which he suspends in the air for a luxurious amount of time, creating an anticipation of something new: here, a lively fugue in our tonic, E-flat Major, on the first four notes of the *Basso del Tema*—for Variation VI, it was the canon in octaves (Var. VII) as above mentioned. Beethoven uses C minor to foreshadow his use of contrapuntal styles of the past.

Ex. 6: Op. 35 Var. XV, Coda

V/C minor = III/E-flat

⁵³ See Marston, "Notes to a Heroic Analysis," 42.

The idea, or technique of rhythmic transformation, using diminution, again, is not an isolated incident. At the end of the piece, in the coda, the opening four measures of the theme is condensed to two measures, then to one measure, and finally to half a measure (mm. 196–203; see **Ex. 7**)—this, again, shows Beethoven utilizing thematic means and transformation to create unity through the variations—at the same time also quickening its harmonic rhythm of repeating V to I (**Ex. 7**); this driving force, from its Dominant to Tonic again and again, is soon again found in the coda to the first movement of *Eroica* Symphony.

Ex. 7: Op. 35, Finale, *Alla Fuga* Coda, mm. 195–205



As we know, the fugue is a traditional form that Beethoven received from his previous generations. But by the late eighteenth century, the idea of incorporating a fugue in instrumental music had lost its favor.⁵⁴ Thus, Beethoven's use of the fugue form was

⁵⁴ See Leonard G. Ratner, *Classic Music: Expression, Form, and Style* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1980), 263.

both a tribute to the past and an innovative experiment, setting up a new trend for the later generations such as Brahms who also had demonstrated “historicist” concerns in his works. Apart from some experimental studies, and one of the WoO sets of variations (WoO 76, 1799) where in its finale Beethoven has a something like a fugal exposition (but soon abandons it), the fugue in this Variation set is the first to resemble a fully developed fugue in Beethoven’s output.⁵⁵

As Thomas Sipe had pointed out, this fugal finale, along with the canonic variation (Var. VII), and Beethoven’s insistence upon the number of the variations being 30,⁵⁶ indicate the influence of, and perhaps rivalry with, Bach’s *Goldberg Variations*, BWV 988.⁵⁷ It is well known that Beethoven had studied the Well-Tempered Clavier in Bonn, and had continued interest in Bach’s works.⁵⁸ For instance, in April of 1801, Beethoven showed the publisher, Franz Anton Hoffmeister, his interest of being a subscriber of Bach’s keyboard works,⁵⁹ and referred to Bach as “the immortal god of harmony.”⁶⁰ Although the *Goldberg Variations* was not published until 1803 by Hoffmeister & Kühnel, it is believed that Beethoven had known the 1763 print of the Bach’s work through either or both the Baron Van Swieten and Prince Karl von Lichnowsky.⁶¹ And it is especially noteworthy that while Beethoven was composing the Op. 35 variations, he mentioned Bach in a letter to Breitkopf & Härtel (April 8,

⁵⁵ John V. Cockshoot, *The Fugue in Beethoven’s Piano Music* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Limited, 1959), 27.

⁵⁶ See the letter to Breitkopf & Härtel quoted in p. 19.

⁵⁷ See Sipe, *Beethoven*, 17.

⁵⁸ See Lockwood, *Beethoven*, 370–76.

⁵⁹ See Anderson, I, 51. The firm of Hoffmeister & Kühnel published the series from 1801 to 1806.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁶¹ Sipe, *Beethoven*, 18.

1803)⁶²—the same letter in which Beethoven explains why there are fewer variations in Op. 35 than the expected 30.

The unique idea of opening the fugue with the bass of the theme as the subject gives the entire cycle a sense of balance⁶³—the bass of the theme appeared at the beginning of the piece before the emergence of the theme, and does so again in the Finale with the fugue, where it becomes the subject material before the emergence of the theme proper at the *Andante con Moto* in the finale (m. 133 in **Ex. 12-2**, p. 31); this Finale is prepared by the pair of Variations XIV and XV, the above-mentioned “combined slow movement.” The *Basso del Tema* in the top register of Variation XIV, and the highly decorated *Tema* in Variation XV foreshadows this grand fugal finale (on the *Basso del Tema*) and two further variations on the *Tema*—the second of which is the climax of the work.

As mentioned earlier, the *Basso del Tema*, used in the *Introduction*, fell into the background throughout the body of the work—the variations—only prominently being recalled in the top voice of the E-flat minor variation (Var. XIV).⁶⁴ But in the fugue, the *Basso del Tema* returns to the prominence as a thematic idea, and one becomes aware of its importance in the whole set, realizing why Beethoven had set the *Introduzione* with its *Basso del Tema* so carefully at the beginning. Because of the fugue, which reminds the listener of the *Basso del Tema*, the *Introduzione* attains stronger reason to be. And because of the *Introduzione*, the fugue does not come out of nowhere, but gains structural right to be.

⁶² Anderson, I, 89.

⁶³ Cockshott also supports the idea. See Cockshott, *The Fugue*, 39.

⁶⁴ For instance, although the bass of the theme is present in Variation IX, in the form of short grace notes, the aggressively hammering consistent sforzato B-flats predominate the variation (see **Ex. 16**, p. 34)

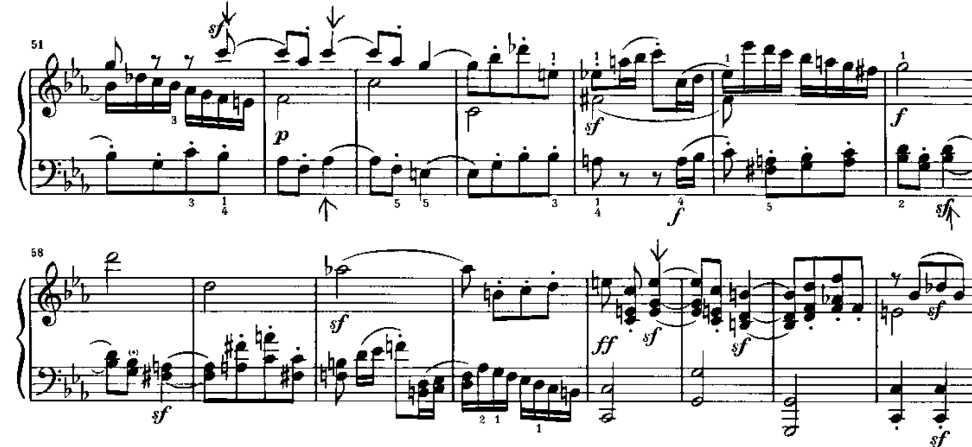
Diminution (m. 65), inversion (m. 90), and the sustained dominant pedal (m. 111) used in this fugue are all devices that are typical of fugal technique. And interestingly, Beethoven creates a new fugal exposition with the use of an inverted subject (see **Ex. 8**).

Ex. 8: Op. 35, Finale, *Alla Fuga*, mm. 90–99



With a melodic fragment of the theme (the opening), emerging from the fugue above the bass of the theme (m. 52, although the theme itself is well incorporated into the fugue, the bass of the theme has its superiority over the theme; see **Ex. 9**), Beethoven gives us the illusion of contrasting middle section⁶⁵ without having to come up with totally new material.

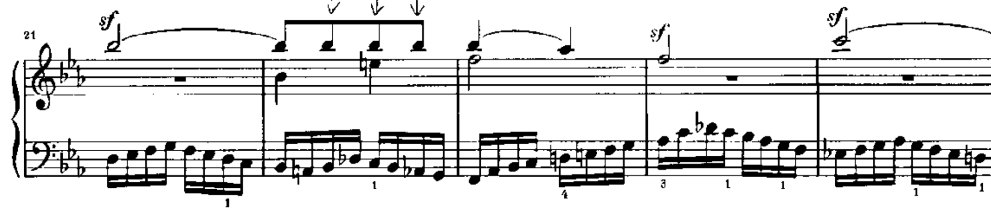
Ex. 9: Op. 35 Finale, *Alla Fuga*, mm. 51–65



⁶⁵ See Misch and deCourcy, "Fugue and Fugato": 17.

Beethoven's desire for thematic unity in his writing can be also seen in the fugue (m. 22 in **Ex. 10**) in his use of the three repeated B-flat eighth-notes of the *Basso del Tema* (m. 11 of the beginning of the piece; see **Ex. 5**, p. 16) and of the accompaniment to the theme (three B-flat eighth-notes in inner voice; see **Ex. 5**, p.17), and the three repeated B-flat quarter notes in mm. 5–6 of the theme (in top voice; see **Ex. 5**, p.17).

Ex. 10: Op. 35 Finale, *Alla Fuga*, mm. 21–25



In addition to this, the sixteenth-notes in the subject (**Ex. 11-1**) are also not a new material; similar writing can be seen in the *A quattro*, in the second part of the theme with its scale-wise aspect (**Ex. 11-2**, m. 9), and also in Variation IV (**Ex. 11-3**).⁶⁶ It is also notable that the countersubject is derived from the subject itself—at the beginning of the piece, how the *Tema* is foreshadowed has been already discussed; this device of unifying the musical ideas,⁶⁷ drawing on the same vocabulary is carried further in the first movement of the Eroica Symphony. For instance, the famous new theme appearing in the Development is based on the main ideas, creating a series of closely related ideas, thus obtaining a unity of the whole.⁶⁸

Ex. 11-1: Op. 35, Finale, *Alla Fuga* mm. 1–8



⁶⁶ Cockshoot also have the same idea. See Cockshoot, *The Fugue*, 39–40.

⁶⁷ See Lockwood, *Beethoven*, 206.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

Ex. 11-2: Op. 35 *A quattro*, mm. 7–11



Ex. 11-3: Op. 35 Var. IV, mm. 1–4



The fugue itself, does not end the piece. It leads straight into two further variations that are not numbered, but are apparent upon inspection because they reintroduce the *Tema*.

When the Prometheus theme (*Tema*) emerges over the *Basso del Tema* at measure 133, it begins to reclaim its supremacy over the bass theme, and exhibits one of Beethoven's characteristics of the middle period—the sense of conflict at the beginning being solved at its end triumphantly; the triumphant side of the Heiligenstadt crisis. Although the bass theme is important, it has a secondary role to the theme proper, like in the *Introduzione*, where the *Basso del Tema* serves as a way of introducing the theme proper. The return of the theme relieves the tension built through the preceding variations.

As Charles Rosen says of the variations in the *Appassionata* sonata (Op. 57):

A feeling of release comes with the return of the theme, in its original form, and this “recapitulation” becomes a resolving force. Through this, the variation form loses its additive character, and conforms to dramatic and spatially conceived design.”⁶⁹

The first post-fugue variation begins with a simple presentation (m. 133 ff.) of the *Tema*. Though it marks the return of the theme, it's simplicity would not allow it to be a proper

⁶⁹ See Rosen, *The Classical Style*, 438–39.

ending; Beethoven would require further development in order to fulfill the requirements of an ending for a piece in his new style.

In the second post-fugue variation the *Tema* triumphantly reenter in the bass in thick chords (m. 165 ff.), with a right hand accompaniment gradually increasing the tension in a progressive rhythmic animation from triplets (m. 165) to thirty second-notes (m. 173, written out repeat of the first part of the theme). As pointed out previously, as the bass gave way to the theme proper right after the *Introduction*, here, once again, the fugue gives way to the return of the theme itself, a musical return to home for the piece and the audience before the rhythmic acceleration drives to the climatic conclusion of the piece.

This return of the *Tema* is prepared by a dominant prolongation. Beginning at measure 111, Beethoven presents repeated octave B-flats in the bass line, preparing the eventual cadence on E-flat, at measure 133. He touches on several chords which lead to the third inversion of V7 of E-flat, which is not inherently a powerful chord. But here, this A-flat note, drawn from the last phrase of the *Basso del Tema* (m. 13, **Ex. 12-1**, p. 31)—this little short note—becomes a titanic feature. What was only one short note in the introduction, is here expanded through elaboration, performed fortissimo, arriving at repeatedly pounded octave A-flats in the left hand in measures 125–28 before continuing the progression on fermata *ff* chords (compare **Ex. 12-1** and **12-2**, p. 31). Beethoven uses this as a framing device, allowing him to return to the theme for the close of the movement.

Ex. 12-1: Op. 35 Introduzione (*Basso del Tema*), mm. 10–17



Ex. 12-2: Op. 35 Finale, *Alla Fuga*, mm. 120–135

The fugue also continues the contrapuntal efforts of the entire cycle, bringing the imitation, counterpoint, and canonic procedures of earlier variations to a climax. In other words, previous variations such as Variations V, VI, VII, XIV (in addition to the *Introduzione*) which are contrapuntal to a greater or lesser degree, had been preparing the fugue.⁷⁰ These also help unify the work, alongside three other distinctive features: registral change/octave displacement, a B-flat pedal and fermata.

First appearing in the *Introduzione*, octave displacement⁷¹ is one of characteristics of this variation set. Such displacement permeates the entire piece; from the beginning of

⁷⁰ See Cockshoot, *The Fugue*, 184.

the piece (mm. 3–4, the octave leap of the B-flat), octave displacement is one of the distinctive features of the *Basso del Tema*. And during the course of the *Introduzione*, the *Basso del Tema* gradually moves up by octaves. This octave displacement not only constantly reoccurs, but is developed through phrase length augmentation in various movements, creating another unifying element throughout this variation set, a clever technique which would have been noticeable not as a cheap trick—like borrowing popular tunes—but as a compositional device for the *Kenner* this piece was aimed at.

In addition to the beginning, Variation V displays this octave displacement. Here, the melody based on the theme is presented in the top voice, the same register as the theme's first appearance right after the *Introduzione*, but in m. 5, it is moved down to the bass, three octaves lower than expected (**Ex. 13**).

Ex. 13: Op. 35 Var. V, mm. 1–8

The musical score for Variation V, measures 1–8, is presented in two systems. The first system (measures 1–4) shows a piano (pp) starting in measure 1, with a crescendo (cresc.) leading to a forte (sf) in measure 5. The melody is in the top voice, and the bass line is in the bottom voice. The second system (measures 5–8) shows the melody moving down to the bass line in measure 5, three octaves lower than expected. The score includes dynamic markings (pp, cresc., sf, p) and articulation (accents, slurs).

A further development can be seen in Variation XIV. This time, the *Basso del Tema* is in the soprano, also in the same register as the theme (see **Ex. 14**, mm. 1–8, p. 33). But in the written out repeat of the first part (mm. 9–16), it moves down to the bass

⁷¹ Although this registral change/octave displacement has been described by Ellwood Derr as “octave alternation,” it is only discussed in a superficial way. See Derr, “Beethoven’s Long-Term Memory”: 65.

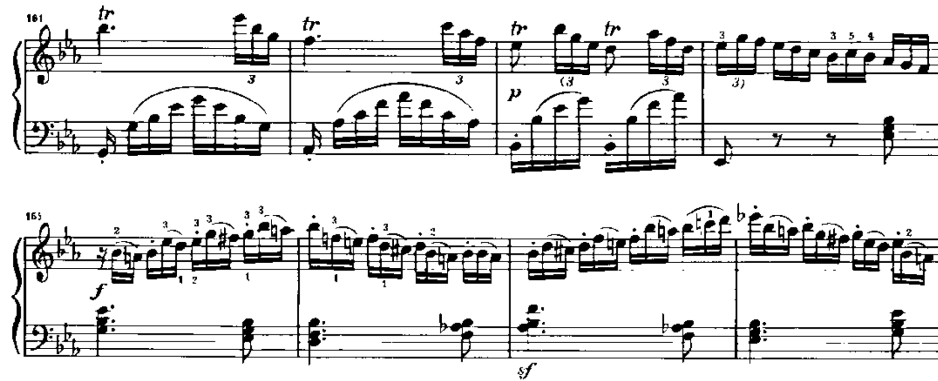
also by three octaves (**Ex. 14**, m. 9 ff.). The second part of this variation also displays octave displacement. This time, the first statement (mm. 17 ff.) is moved upward an octave in the written out varied repeat (mm. 25 ff.). While in Variation V the octave displacement occurs after four measures, here in Variation XIV, it happens after eight measures. It is also noteworthy that in measures 9–12, B-flat of the *Basso del Tema* is explored; here, there are four B-flats (the reason for having four will be explained shortly) in inner voice—notice that contrasted to this, in measures 13–14, there are three B-flats (in the top voice) as in the measure 11 of *Basso del Tema*.

Ex. 14: Op. 35 Var. XIV, mm. 1–20

The idea, or device of octave displacement is greatly expanded through the two post-fugue variations. In the first post-fugue variation, the theme is in the original register (mm. 133–64, **Ex. 12-2**, p. 31), but in the second post-fugue variation, the theme is in the bass of the chords, two octaves lower than the previous one (mm. 165 ff., **Ex. 15**, p. 34). In measures 181–196, although not strictly in the lowest voice, the theme continues in the

left hand (for instance, mm. 184–86 in the top of the left hand chords, and mm. 187–8 in inner voice of the left hand chords).

Ex. 15: Op. 35 Finale, *Alla Fuga*, mm. 161–168



Therefore, through the phrase length expansion from four measures (Var. V) to eight (Var. XIV), and to even longer measures (two post-fugue variations), using both the *Basso del Tema* (Var. XIV) and *Tema* (Var. V and two post-fugue variations), Beethoven is using octave displacement not only at the local level, but spaced throughout the piece to provide deeper meaning; it not only helps unifying the variations, but also gives developmental character, thus contributing to this variation set's goal-oriented characteristics. And also by framing the *Basso del Tema* (Var. XIV) with *Tema* (Var. V and post-fugue variations), Beethoven solves the conflicts between the two.

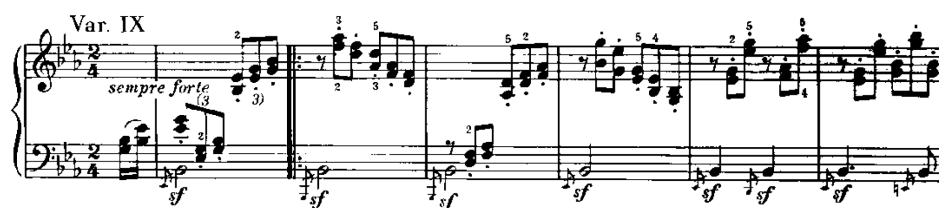
Octave displacement is also seen within the second post-fugue variation. In measure 181, the beginning of the second part (the sixteenth-note, scale-wise figure of the theme) is moved up two octaves, then back to its normal (within this variation) lower register in measure 183—this procedure is repeated in the written out repeat of the second part. It is noteworthy that this level of octave displacement is only found in this variation, not in the first post-fugue variation. With the dominant broken octave pedal (cleverly, using the

same register as the second and the third notes of the *Basso del Tema*) first in triplets, then in thirty-second-notes in right hand, moving up and down different registers, Beethoven heightens the emotional content and the drives to the cadence.

The fermata in measure 13 has been previously mentioned as an example of a compositional device, a thumb-print, in this variation set, which creates unity between the variations. However, the creation of unity through the development of the three B-flats from measure 11 has not yet been discussed. In *Introduzione*, with the *Basso del Tema*, Beethoven presents three repeated B-flats (m. 11). These B-flats reappear throughout the variations as a pedal device, and in some variations this pedal point becomes the central focus—this is seen, for instance, in both periods of Vars. IX, X, XI, XIII and the first period (mm. 133–48) of the return of the theme (or first post-fugue variation, specially highlighted by the trills in inner voice in mm. 141–48).⁷²

For example, in Variation IX—which is similar to Variation XIII in using hammered grace notes—the left hand plays constant, often sforzando B-flats aggressively, creating a dominating pedal effect (**Ex. 16**). Beethoven does present the different pitches of the *Basso del Tema* in short grace notes, but they are not nearly as prominent as the sustained B-flats.

Ex. 16: Op. 35 Var. IX, mm. 1–6



⁷² See Derr, “Beethoven’s Long-Term Memory”: 65.

In the next variation (Var. X), we can clearly see the B-flats, jumping from one octave to the next. At this point it seems Beethoven grew tired of his repeated B-flats, feeling that B-flats would no longer have any significant impact. Because of this pervasiveness of the B-flats in these two variations, the original hammering B-flats are moved up a half-step to the surprisingly non-diatonic C-flats (**Ex. 17**). And this is, of course, not the only incident of C-flat—it is used repeatedly, in the second part of the Var. XIV to emphasize B-flats, as seen in **Example 14** (mm. 17 ff.; see p. 33).

Ex. 17: Op. 35 Var. X, mm. 8–12



Another very interesting example of using B-flat would be the recapitulation of the theme proper in the Finale (m. 133). In the *Introduzione*, with the *Basso del Tema*, we usually think of the B-flat as being three in number. But there are actually four, because we must include the last fermata B-flat which occurs after the rests. This is the reason why there are four B-flats in the inner voice of Variation XIV (**Ex. 14**, mm. 9–12, p. 33). However, right after this Beethoven reasserts the three B-flats in top voice, as if correcting the number to three (**Ex. 14**, mm. 13–4). The Variation XIV is thus, preparing this four B-flats of the return of the *Tema*. And these four B-flats are charmingly and faithfully reproduced in the form of an inner voice pedal tone in measure 133 (**Ex. 18**, mm. 133 ff., p. 37), and become trills, vibration on B-flat in measure 141 (see also **Ex. 18**).

Ex. 18: Op. 35 Finale, *Alla Fuga*, mm. 132–45



The transformation of the B-flats, from their almost comical, violent insistence at the beginning of the piece, to the lovely B-flats in the return of the theme is noteworthy. Again, this is also one of the moments which shows Beethoven's characteristic cleverness; Beethoven takes something which at the beginning possessed a particular character, and through development has made it into an entirely different musical expression. By allowing the variations to both continually be based on the *Basso del Tema* and *Tema*, and at the same time showing the compositional complexity arising from his new method, Beethoven achieves compositional unity.

Conclusion

In the last decades of the eighteenth century, when few considered a variation set as an unalterable, carefully designed whole, and would often make omissions, additions, and rearrangements to make it fit to their own needs (for instance, Mozart had extracted

some pieces from his *Fischer Variations* to present to the elector of Mannheim), and when, as August Halm once pointed out, “a series of variations should become a real form is anything but obvious”⁷³ Beethoven created “a form from a series.”⁷⁴

In the previously mentioned 1802 letter of Beethoven’s to Breitkopf & Härtel, containing his announcement that his Op. 34 and Op. 35 variation sets are composed in an “entirely new manner,” Beethoven indicates to his publisher how important this time was for his compositional development. In his memoirs, Carl Czerny recounted Beethoven’s compositional state of mind around this time, saying:

About the year 1800, when Beethoven had composed Op. 28 he said to his intimate friend, Krumpholtz: ‘I am far from satisfied with my past works: from today on I shall take a new way.’ Shortly after this appeared his three sonatas Opus 31, in which one may see that he had partially carried out his resolve.⁷⁵

Based on the composition date and the published years of Op. 28 and Op. 31, (1801/1802 for Op. 28, 1802/1803–4 for Op. 31), the timing of Beethoven’s statement can be narrowed down between the beginning of 1801 and April of 1802.⁷⁶

When one considers how crucial the years from 1801 to 1803 were to Beethoven, as the time in which he began his “middle period” style, it is quite astonishing that during this time Beethoven kept using the same theme so explicitly and dynamically. It is also astonishing that, although written during this transitional time, his Variations Op. 35 foreshadows or exhibits many characteristics of his mature middle period and even his late style, such as his tendency toward the third-related key relationship, goal-

⁷³ August Halm, *Beethoven* (Berlin: M.Hesse, 1927; reprint, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1971), 79–80, 177; quoted in Whiting, “To the ‘New Manner’ Born,” 345.

⁷⁴ Whiting, “To the ‘New Manner’ born,” 345.

⁷⁵ Carl Czerny, *Memoirs*; cited in Oscar George Theodore Sonneck, ed., *Beethoven: Impressions by his Contemporaries* (New York: Dover Publications, 1967), 31.

⁷⁶ Philip G. Downs, “Beethoven’s ‘New Way’ and the Eroica,” in *The Creative World of Beethoven*, Paul Henry Lang ed., 83.

orientedness, end-weightedness, sense of conflict triumphantly settled at the end, expansion or experimentation of the form, contrapuntal thinking, etc. It was also from this point on that many of Beethoven's large-scale works, as Elaine Sisman so effectively states, "have prominent conjunctions of variation and fugue," therefore "forecasting the central place these forms would have in his late style."⁷⁷

The Op. 35 variations illustrate Beethoven's treatment of thematic unity to connect all the variations together, demonstrating the fact that he is concerned not only with the melodic profile of the theme, but also with its bass line and its harmonic scheme. Furthermore, every time there is a surprise, like the B-flats of the opening, the C minor variation, and the unexpected C-flats instead of the expected B-flats, Beethoven—*being Beethoven*—always comes back from the unusual in some way to the beginning material; everything is meticulously and intentionally interconnected! By creating these connections, incorporating traditional variation techniques—such as the figurative variations (Var. I, II, IV) and the *minore* variation (Var. XIV), the slow-fast pairing at the end—and the innovative procedures such as developing the theme gradually from the bass line, the return of the bass of the theme in the fugue, and the triumphant culmination of the theme itself at the end of the cycle (the second post-fugue variation), Beethoven successfully created something new out of something old in his "new manner," elevating what was an essentially light genre at the time into a high genre as serious as the sonata.

⁷⁷ Elaine Sisman, "Variations," *Grove Music Online*. (Accessed 23 October 2012), available from <http://www.Oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music>.

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